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NARRATIVE TO DRAMA: EXPLORING TEXTUAL TRANSFORMATION IN BORCHERT'S SHORT STORY *DAS BROT*

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Abstract

This study examines the transformation of short story texts by Wolfgang Borchert into dramatic scripts as a classroom learning activity, with particular attention to three of his short story "Das Brot" (1946). By adopting Klaus Brinker's concept of text type analysis—particularly his criteria of narrative structure—and Manfred Pfister's of drama analysis as the main theoretical frameworks, the study analyzes the structural and communicative changes that occur in the process of transforming narrative texts into the dramatic genre, which serves as the basis for the students in composing dramatic scripts. This process also serves as the basis for students in composing their own dramatic scripts. The findings indicate that students are generally able to identify narrative elements and transform them in accordance with the conventions of dramatic texts, although challenges remain, particularly in shifting the narrator's point of view into dialogue between the characters. This study contributes to the development of text-transformation-based learning in the context of German language and literature teaching.

Keywords: short stories, dramatic script, text transformation, Wolfgang Borchert

1. INTRODUCTION

The engagement with literary texts should extend beyond traditional cognitive activities such as reading, understanding, analyzing, and interpreting. Literary texts should be "brought back to life again" and given meaning by readers through productive attitudes and actions, such as reproducing, repackaging, creating something new, or transporting them into other media. In other words, literature is not merely received but actively transformed by its readers.

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This understanding is particularly relevant in the context of German language and literature education at the university level, where learning should not only activate receptive competencies but also encourage students to engage actively and productively with literary texts. One approach that effectively fosters such competencies is text transformation—the process of transposing a text from one genre into another. This activity does not merely train writing skills; it also deepens students' understanding of genre conventions, textual structure, and the communicative functions of language. Text transformation thus positions students not as passive recipients of literature but as active agents who construct meaning through the creative reprocessing of literary works.

It is within the context that the present study is situated. As a classroom learning activity, students are assigned to transform a short story (*Kurzgeschichte*) *Das Brot* (1946) by Wolfgang Borchert into dramatic scripts. As one of the most influential German post-war authors, Borchert's short stories are marked by short scenes, a fragmentary narrative style, and strong dramatic situations that make them particularly suitable for exploration through genre transformation. His short stories emerge between desolation and hope, between death and life, and between despair and faith and capture various psychological and physical dimensions of human existence during and after the war (Meyer-Marwitz, 2009). The narrative density and dialogic potential of his texts provide ample opportunities for students to engage creatively in the process of writing dramatic scripts.

The short story *Das Brot* depicts an elderly married couple living in the post-war period who struggle with hunger in their everyday lives. The transformation from these short story to dramatic scripts is not a simple process. These two genres differ fundamentally in their textual conventions. As a narrative form, the short story relies on narration, description, and narrative perspective to convey events and characters' emotions. In contrast, dramatic texts depend primarily on dialogue between characters and stage directions (*Nebentext*) as the main means of expression. Therefore, when students convert short stories into dramatic scripts, they do not merely transfer content but must undertake a comprehensive structural and communicative transformation.

To analyze both the process and the outcomes of this transformation, the study is based on two main theoretical frameworks. First, the concept of text type analysis was proposed by Klaus Brinker. In *Linguistische Textanalyse* (1985), Brinker argues that each text-type possesses specific communicative functions and structural features. Shifts in function and structure occur when converting a text into another type, allowing for systematic analysis. This framework provides a solid linguistic basis for examining the changes involved in transforming short stories into dramatic scripts. Second, the study employs Manfred Pfister's theory of drama analysis as outlined in *Das Drama: Theorie und Analyse* (1977). Pfister distinguishes between dialogue (*Haupttext*) and stage directions (*Nebentext*) and elaborates on key dimensions of dramatic texts such as speech situations, characterization, and communicative structure. His framework is used to evaluate the quality of the student's dramatic scripts.

By combining Brinker's text-linguistic perspective with Pfister's theory of drama, this study aims to describe the patterns of transformation carried out by students, identify the challenges they encounter, and evaluate the resulting dramatic scripts. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to the development of text transformation as a pedagogical model in the teaching of the German language and literature in Indonesia, while also enriching research on genre transformation within applied linguistics.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study sits at the intersection of two fields: the text-linguistik framework and drama theory. A review of the relevant literature in each of these fields is therefore necessary to situate the study within the broader academic conversation and to establish the theoretical foundations upon which the analysis rests.

2.1. The Thematic Development

A useful starting point of analyzing narrative structures in this study is the text-linguistic framework proposed by Klaus Brinker (2010), particularly his concept of thematic development (*narrative Themenentfaltung*). Brinker characterizes narrative texts as sequences in which events unfold progressively, with themes organized temporally and causally. This progression typically follows a structured pattern consisting of an initial situation, a complication, and a resolution, enabling readers to reconstruct coherence through the logical and chronological linkage of actions.

Brinker's theory provides a significant analytical lens for identifying narrative elements and understanding the mechanisms of thematic development in prose texts. At the same time, it highlights the complexity involved in transferring these elements into the dramatic genre, where thematic progression must be externalized through dialogue and stage action rather than conveyed through narrative exposition. His concept of thematic development is particularly productive for understanding which elements change and which must be preserved when a narrative text is transformed into a dramatic form.

For the explication of narrative thematic development—especially as it appears in everyday storytelling—the structural model developed by W. Labov and J. Waletzky (as cited in Brinker, 2010) offers a complementary approach. This model has since become a "classic" and continues to be widely referenced in narrative research. Labov and Waletzky define narration as a verbal technique for the recapitulation of experience, more specifically as the construction of narrative units that correspond to the temporal sequence of lived events. They distinguish the following functional components of narrative structure: (1) Orientation (*Orientierung*), which provides information about place, time, characters, etc.; (2) Complication (*Komplikation*), which introduces an unusual event; (3) Evaluation (*Evaluation*), which conveys the narrator's perspective, including emotional responses; (4) Resolution (*Resolution*), which presents the outcome of the complication, whether positive or negative; and (5) Coda (*Coda*), an optional statement by the narrator from the time of narration.

This model by Labov and Waletzky can still be regarded as a suitable point of departure for a thematically oriented analysis of everyday narratives. However, certain modifications are necessary. In contrast to Labov and Waletzky, narrative structure should be conceived as a basic thematic structure that does not necessarily correspond to the linear order of the realized sentences or propositions. It can be assumed that the realization of this basic structure depends on the communicative function of the narration.

In contrast to Labov and Waletzky, Brinker proceeds from three basic categories: situating (*Situierung*), representation (*Repräsentation*), and summary (*Resümee*). The category of situating is not to be equated with Labov's concept of orientation. Situating is defined in thematic terms, whereas orientation refers to the communicative function of situating. Example: The narrator finds himself on a mountain hike in heavy rain and fog and attempts to locate the path to a hut.

At the center of the narrative lies the processual-actional representation of the event, which is constituted by one or more phases of events. Each phase contains, as its core, an event or action sequence composed of a complication and a resolution. In addition, situating elements and

evaluations referring to the narrated events themselves may be included. It thus becomes evident that what is specifically narrative resides in the structure of representation.

The category of summary refers to a retrospective assessment from the point of time of narration (i.e., the present moment). With the summary, the narrator—unlike in the case of evaluation—steps out of the past world of the narrated story and, on a higher level of reflection, offers a general and timeless interpretation of the experience.

2.2. Narrative versus Dramatic

Both narrative and dramatic texts share the common goal of presenting fictional worlds and characters. They differ substantially in the way they structure and mediate communication between the author, the text, and the reader or audience. In *Das Drama: Theorie und Analyse*, Manfred Pfister (2000; 2001) provides a systematic framework for understanding this distinction. He conceptualises both narrative and dramatic texts as layered communication systems, in which messages are transmitted across multiple levels simultaneously.

Dramatic texts differ from epic or narrative texts in that they are consistently presented in the mode of representation. The receiver of a dramatic text is confronted directly with the characters represented, in narrative texts these characters are mediated through a more or less concrete narrator figure. Käthe Hamburger (as cited in Pfister, 2001) argues that the position of drama within the system of literature arises from the absence of the narrative function and from the structural fact that its characters are constituted dialogically.

A Communication Model for Narrative and Dramatic Texts

In narrative texts, the actual author (*empirischer Autor*) functions in his socio-literary role as the producer of the text. He creates in his text (a) the fictional narrator (*fiktiver Erzähler*), which constitutes the narrative medium within the text; (b) the fictional characters (*fiktive Figuren*), which communicate with one another through dialogue; and (c) the fictional addressee (*fiktive Hörer*), which is addressed by the fictional narrator. The ideal receiver (*ideale Rezipienten*) is complemented by the actual reader.

Depending on the narrative situation, (a) authorial narrative (*auktoriale Erzählung*) requires that the positions of the fictional narrator and the fictional addressee be occupied by fully independent characters; (b) I-narrative (*Ich-Erzählung*) requires that the authorial narrative be occupied by one of the characters; and (c) in personal narrative (*personale Erzählung*), the positions of the fictional narrator and the fictional addressee should fade out into a transparent, disembodied medium of narration.

In dramatic texts, the position of the fictional narrator and the fictional addressee are left vacant, thereby eliminating the mediating communication system. This loss of communicative potential in comparison to narrative texts is compensated for in two ways. First, dramatic texts have access to non-verbal code and channels, which are able, in part, to take on the communicative functions of the fictional narrator and the fictional addressee, and secondly, aspects of the narrative function may be transferred to the internal communication system—for example, by questions and answers from the fictional characters designed to inform the audience more than the protagonists do themselves. These include the explanatory and interpretative functions of para-texts (*Nebentexte*) in the form of introductions (*Einleitungen*), prefaces (*Vorwörter*), or extended stage

directions (*ausgedehnte Bühnenanweisungen*), and finally, the introduction of commentator or producer figures (*die Einführung von Regie- und Kommentatorfiguren*).

The Time-Space Structures of Narrative and Dramatic Texts

In the absence of the mediating, fictional narrator from dramatic texts, the time-space continuum associated with it does not apply. In narrative texts, the variability of these two deictic systems of reference allows all sorts of arbitrary rearrangements of time-space relationships to be made, especially in the chronology of the narrative (*Chronologie des Erzählten*), topographical juxtapositions (*topographische Verschränkungen*), the stretching (*Raffung*) and shrinking (*Dehnung*) of narrative time, and the extension (*Erweiterung*) or restriction (*Einengung*) of locale.

Dramatic texts, on the other hand, lack the fictional narrator as an overriding point of orientation. Here, it is therefore, the time-space continuum of the plot alone that determines the progress of the text within the individual scenic units (*szenischer Ausschnitt*). It is only the act of choosing the various scenic units with their respective time-space proportions and relationships towards the plot as a whole that is of intentional and communicative relevance.

Dialogue in Dramatic and Narrative Texts

Where, in narrative texts, the narrator's discourse overlaps with that of fictional characters introduced through quotation by the narrator, verbal expression in staged dramatic texts is reduced to the mono- or dialogical speeches of the dramatic figures. In other words, characters present themselves directly in their role as speakers. Accordingly, character speech—and above all dialogicue—constitutes the primary verbal mode of dramatic texts. As a result, the performative dimension described by speech-act theory is always present in dramatic dialogue.

As speech acts, the dramatic speech constitutes its own specific speech situation. This stands in contrast to dialogue in narrative texts, where the fictional speech situation can be constituted by the narrator's report.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical research design. The qualitative approach is chosen because the study aims to describe and analyze the process and outcomes of text transformation carried out by students, rather than to measure or quantify data.

The subjects of this study are fourth-semester students enrolled in the German literature course *Literarische Textanalyse* in the German Studies Program at Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia. The object of the study is the drama scripts produced by the students as the outcome of text transformation activities. The source texts consist the short story *Das Brot* by Wolfgang Borchert. These short story is selected because it exhibit complex narrative characteristics, contain dialogue that can be further developed, and possess high emotional and dramatic intensity, making them suitable for transformation into the drama genre.

The analysis proceeds from two theoretical perspectives. From the perspective of Brinker's analysis, the focus falls on how students handled the shift in textual function and thematic development between the narrative and dramatic genres—specifically, how the three thematic categories of situating, representation, and summary, which structured Borchert's short story, were converted into the conventions of dramatic texts. From the perspective of Pfister's drama

theory, the analysis examines how students navigated the fundamental structural difference between narrative and dramatic communication. The absence of mediating in dramatic texts and the consequent need to redistribute narrative information across dialogue (*Haupttext*) and stage directions (*Nebentext*).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the context of short stories by Wolfgang Borchert, the narrative development is often condensed but still adheres to Brinker's principles of thematic progression. Each element—setting, character, action, and conflict—contributes to a tightly structured thematic arc. When such narratives are transformed into dramatic scripts, as explored in this study, the linear and narrator-mediated thematic unfolding must be reconfigured into dialogic and performative structures. This shift challenges students to reinterpret narrative coherence without the guiding presence of a narrator, instead relying on character interaction and scenic representation.

This section presents and discusses the results of the analysis of dramatic scripts produced by the German literature course, in which three short stories by Wolfgang Borchert, *Das Brot* (1946), *Die Küchenuhr* (1947), and *Die Kirschen* (1947) served as the source texts for transformation into dramatic scripts.

The short story *Das Brot* tells of an elderly married couple living in the post-war period in Germany, struggling with food scarcity in their everyday lives. One night, the wife wakes up and finds her husband in the kitchen, secretly eating bread. He lies about his reason for being there, and although she recognizes the lie, she chooses to say nothing. The following morning, she quietly gives him part of her own portion of bread. The short story opens with a very precisely rendered domestic scene:

Plötzlich wachte sie auf. Es war halb drei. Sie überlegte, warum sie aufgewacht war. Ach so! In der Küche hatte jemand gegen einen Stuhl gestoßen. Sie horchte nach der Küche. Es war still. Es war zu still, und als sie mit der Hand über das Bett neben sich fuhr, fand sie es leer. Das war es, was es so besonders still gemacht hatte; sein Atem fehlte. Sie stand auf und tappte durch die dunkle Wohnung zur Küche. In der Küche trafen sie sich. Die Uhr war halb drei. Sie sah etwas Weißes am Küchenschrank stehen. Sie machte Licht. Sie standen sich im Hemd gegenüber. Nachts. Um halb drei. In der Küche.

Auf dem Küchentisch stand der Brotteller. Sie sah, dass er sich Brot abgeschnitten hatte. Das Messer lag noch neben dem Teller und auf der Decke lagen Brotkrümel. Wenn sie abends zu Bett gingen, machte sie immer das Tisch Tuch sauber. Jeden Abend. Aber nun lagen Krümel auf dem Tuch. Und das Messer lag da. Sie fühlte, wie die Kälte der Fliesen langsam an ihr hochkroch. Und sie sah von dem Teller weg.” (Töteberg, 2009)

In this scene, the wife wakes up in the middle of the night to an empty space beside her in bed. The kitchen light is on. The setting is established through details such as the chill of the floor, the harsh light, and the silence of the night. The characters are introduced without names, identifying only as “she” (sie) and “he” (er), a narrative that universalizes their situation and positions them as representatives of an entire generation living in scarcity and shame.

The representation phase encompasses the confrontation in the kitchen. The wife discovers her husband standing by the table with a piece of bread. He claims he heard a noise; the wife pretends to believe him. Neither speaks the truth. The representation in this story is characterized by what is not said rather than what is said. Borchert's narrator conveys the full weight of the husband's shame and the wife's compassion through minute physical observations: the husband's hands, his averted gaze, and the way he moves back to bed.

The summary of *Das Brot* is one of the most powerful closing gestures in Borchert's prose. The following morning, without a word of explanation or acknowledgement, the wife places her own portion of bread on her husband's plate. She tells him she cannot eat bread in the morning—a lie that answers his lie from the night before. The narrator closes the story at this point, without commentary or reflection: "Erst nach einer Weile setzte sie sich unter die Lampe an den Tisch." (Töteberg, 2009) (Only after a while did she sit down at the table under the lamp.) This absence of an explicit narratorial summary is itself a meaningful choice. Borchert trusts the reader to recognize the full significance of the wife's gesture without authorial guidance.

As cited above, the opening and closing sections of the short story perform a narrative function of observing, interpreting, and evaluating the character's actions and emotional states through the mediating voice of the narrator. In the process of transforming into dramatic scripts, students were required to redistribute this narrative function across the two textual layers available in dramatic texts—the dialogue (*Haupttext*) and the stage directions (*Nebentext*). Since the opening and closing sections contain no dialogue, their content was transferred primarily into the *Nebentext*. In the example below, the resulting dramatic script is indicated by the use of parentheses and bold:

(Plötzlich wacht die Frau auf. Es war halb drei.)

or italicised type

(In der Küche stößt jemand gegen einen Stuhl. Die Frau horcht nach der Küche. Es ist still. Es ist zu still, und als sie mit der Hand über das Bett neben sich fährt, findet sie es leer. Das ist es, was es so besonders still macht; das Atem ihres Mannes fehlt. Sie steht auf und tappt durch die dunkle Wohnung zur Küche. In der Küche treffen sich die Frau und ihr Mann. Die Uhr ist halb drei. Sie sieht etwas Weißes am Küchenschrank stehen. Sie macht Licht. Die Frau und ihr Mann stehen sich im Hemd gegenüber. Nachts. Um halb drei. In der Küche.)

Das Brot employs what Pfister classifies as personal narrative (*personale Erzählung*). The narrator does not present himself as a fully independent character (authorial narrative), nor does he speak as a participant in the events (I-narrative). Instead, the narrator fades into a transparent medium of narration. He present everywhere in the text yet invisible as a character, perceiving the events from a position of intimate to both characters without belonging to either. For example:

«Ich habe auch was gehört», antwortete sie, und dabei fand sie, dass er nachts im Hemd doch schon recht alt aussah. So alt wie er war. Dreiundsechzig. Tagsüber sah er manchmal jünger aus. Sie sieht doch schon alt aus, dachte er, im Hemd sieht sie doch ziemlich alt aus. Aber das liegt vielleicht an den Haaren. Bei den Frauen liegt das nachts immer an den Haaren. Die machen dann auf einmal so alt. (Töteberg, 2009)

This narrative situation has significant implications for the communication model of *Das Brot*. In the process of transforming the text into a dramatic script, students were required to report the inner thoughts of the wife and the husband and, at the same time, to observe their physical behavior from the outside, corresponding to what Genette (1980; cf. Genette, 2010; Martínez and Scheffel, 2019) defines as "external focalization". Such dual access is not possible in dramatic texts and constitutes both the primary source of the story's communicative power and the greatest challenge for its dramatic transformation. In the example below, the resulting dramatic script is indicated by the use of parentheses and bold type, which is embedded within the dialogue:

"DIE FRAU: Ich habe auch was gehört. **(Und dabei denkt sie.)** Er sieht nachts im Hemd doch schon recht alt aussieht. Dreiundsechzig. Tagsüber sieht er manchmal jünger aus.

DER MANN (denkt): Sie sieht doch schon alt aus. Im Hemd sieht sie doch ziemlich alt aus. Aber das liegt vielleicht an den Haaren. Bei den Frauen liegt das nachts immer an den Haaren. Die machen dann auf einmal so alt." (Töteberg, 2009)

The dialogue of *Das Brot* is an example of what Pfister identifies as the fundamental difference between dialogue in narrative and dramatic texts. In Borchert's story, the dialogue is mediated by the narrator. Every speech act is introduced by a reporting verb such as "sagte er" or "antwortete sie". For example:

«Ich habe auch was gehört», antwortete sie, und dabei fand sie, dass er nachts im Hemd doch schon recht alt aussah. So alt wie er war. Dreiundsechzig. Tagsüber sah er manchmal jünger aus. Sie sieht doch schon alt aus, dachte er, im Hemd sieht sie doch ziemlich alt aus. Aber das liegt vielleicht an den Haaren. Bei den Frauen liegt das nachts immer an den Haaren. Die machen dann auf einmal so alt. (Töteberg, 2009)

When the dialogue is transferred into dramatic form, this has fundamental consequences for how the dialogue must be written and staged. In the dramatic scripts, this performative dimension is activated through the relationship between *Haupttext* and *Nebentext*. In the example below, the resulting dramatic script is indicated by the use of bold uppercase letters for the character's names, followed by a colon:

DIE FRAU: Ich habe auch was gehört.

DER MANN (denkt): Sie sieht doch schon alt aus. Im Hemd sieht sie doch ziemlich alt aus. Aber das liegt vielleicht an den Haaren. Bei den Frauen liegt das nachts immer an den Haaren. Die machen dann auf einmal so alt.

5. CONCLUSION

Drawing on Klaus Brinker's framework of text analysis and Manfred Pfister's theory of drama, the study has analysed the structural and communicative changes that occur in the process of transforming narrative into dramatic genre, and has evaluated the quality of the dramatic script

produced by students in terms of their handling of *Haupttext*, *Nebentext*, and the compensatory mechanism available in dramatic texts.

The analysis demonstrated that the situating and representation categories were successfully handled in the student script. They showed a clear intuition. The categories summary and shifting the narrator's point of, proved to be the most challenging across the text and its presence is not clearly traceable in the text.

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